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ABSTRACT

After three decades of diverse and intense immigration accompanied by a range of well intentioned initiatives by the Australian government to meet the needs of immigrants, there remain unsolved problems. An Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs evaluation (1982) found major achievements in establishing intensive programs of English instruction for new arrivals, providing grants to ethnic and voluntary organizations to undertake immigrant welfare services, extending telephone interpreter service to several major centers, and introducing multicultural television service in state capitals with highest ethnic concentration. However, the English teaching profession in Australia lacks training and expertise to respond to the wide range of second language learners. The cultural mores of many immigrant parents lead them to place ultimate faith in schools to such an extent that they do not become involved in the curriculum decision-making process that affects their children. Within the fabric of contemporary Australian society there exists a fundamental dissonance between the myopia of monolingualism and a government commitment to community languages and cultural maintenance. The English-as-a-mother-tongue population lacks a sense of community except in reactive recognition of other more tightly knit communities. The levels of tolerance and understanding run low and, despite every humanizing attempt, racism festers. (NEC)

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Sue Shafer, a visiting professor to Australia in 1982, wrote in a paper entitled "Australian Approaches to Multicultural Education" that

> Australians speak of their immigrants, the people who come to live there, as migrants, perhaps because not all have made a commitment to stay in the country permanently. Shafer, 1982, pp. 13-14)

As a visitor to the country, Shafer's attribution of motive to Australians was both a product of logic and of politeness. It is the case that not all immigrants to Australia commit themselves irrevocably and at first sight to permanent Australian residence. It is also true that, for many, familial and cultural ties with the mother country render frequent cross visitation both necessary and pleasurable.

Regrettably, however, and perhaps Shafer simply spared her host country the opprobrium of the speculation, the perception of many Australians still is that migrants are transient beings - a perception that finds metres high expression in the railway station slogan "GO HOME WOG". And, indeed, the "wog" seeking to prove true blue Aussie acculturation joins with his mates to find even more egregious terms with which to beleaguer more recent refugee arrivals.

Official government policy is now very much more enlightened than it was when assimilation was seen to be the swiftest and most desirable aim for a newly arrived citizen.

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* Working paper prepared for and used by the study group on Language and Multicultural Education at the IFTE International Seminar: LANGUAGE, SCHOOLING, AND SOCIETY held at Michigan State University, November 11-14, 1984.

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After three decades of diverse and intense migration accompanied by a range of disparate but nevertheless well intentioned government initiatives to attempt to meet the needs of migrants, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a Review of post-arrival programs and services for migrants. The brief of the Committee of Review was to examine the changing needs of migrants with a view to making appropriate recommendations to ensure that the needs thus identified were being met effectively.

The resultant Report of the Review of Post-Arrival Programs and Services for Migrants, now generally known as the Galbally Report (1978), elucidated four guiding principles as a basis for action thus:

(a) all members of our society must have equal opportunity to realise their full potential and must have equal access to programs and services;
(b) every person should be able to maintain his or her culture without prejudice or disadvantage and should be encouraged to understand and embrace other cultures;
(c) needs of migrants should, in general, be met by programs and services available to the whole community but special services and programs are necessary at present to ensure equality of access and provision;
(d) services and programs should be designed and operated in full consultation with clients, and self-help should be encouraged as much as possible with a view to helping migrants to become self-reliant quickly (para. 1.7).

This Report, together with its major implications for implementation and finance, was accepted by the government of the day. In September 1981 the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs was commissioned by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs to prepare an evaluation of the objectives and implementation of the Galbally Report recommendations and proposals.

The AIMA Evaluation Report "found an impressive record of implementation" and noted major achievements and initiatives in specific areas:-

* the establishment of a new intensive program to provide English instruction and essential information to new arrivals;

* the doubling of the number of grants to ethnic and voluntary organizations to undertake migrant welfare services;

* the extension of the telephone interpreter service to several major centres;

* the introduction of a multicultural television service in the state capitals of highest ethnic concentration.

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Although "across the range of recommendations and associated proposals, the [AIMA] Evaluation ... found evidence of tangible and significant gains in the direction of the central objectives", the Report was at pains both to point out that such a massive undertaking could not necessarily be achieved in such a brief three year span, and to acknowledge that there were some areas in which very little evidence of positive movement towards the achievement of the objectives. The Evaluation Report sounded a distinctly cautionary note thus:

> Detailed examination of specific areas shows considerable unevenness in the degree to which the pursuit of recommendations has served the intended objectives. This is most apparent where little or no significant activity has taken place. But it is also the case in some areas where much energy - and sometimes substantial resources has been expended. Accounts of activity have sometimes been misinterpreted as records of achievement. (para. 16)
>
> In terms of the pattern of progress, one feature stands out. Most movement appears to have occurred in programs and services which are relatively specific. Where the Report made broader proposals, calling on government departments and other bodies to make changes in their established general programs and policies, the evidence of responsiveness is less apparent. On occasion, objectives have been all but ignored, or pursued with little conviction (para. 17).

The reality is that there remain many unsolved problems, most strikingly so in the areas of education , work, and health.

The migrant professional is disadvantaged in terms of access to his profession despite specifically designed English for Special Purposes courses (under Galbally Recommendation 13). A plethora of barriers have been erected - some cultural, some linguistic. The anomaly is that the Vietnamese medico who flunks the Shakespeare section on the English test may have a longer and firmer acquaintance with that Elizabethan gentleman than his ocker Australian peers for whom "English" was considered either irrelevant or a subject in which a compensatory "pass" was perfectly acceptable, if not a basal norm. The other side of the coin is that the communication skills of the latter in a medical interview situation may not be very much superior to those of the former.

The aspiring migrant student, while lacking the most obvious disadvantages of recent arrival, must suffer a degree of dissonance from both cultures since many schools have responded to the increase in cultural diversity by

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deciding that the cultural tradition which had informed Australian education since its inception was no longer appropriate. In addition, and perhaps more fundamentally, the English teaching profession in Australia lacks the training and expertise which would enable it to respond to the challenge of a wide range of second language learners. The ESL program is separate and staffed more by teachers with a background in teaching a foreign language than mother tongue. This creates problems not only for the student as learner but also for the parents who find it extremely difficult to divine the code of the school and to respond to the reporting system.

The cultural mores of many migrant parents lead them to place ultimate faith in the school and its arbiters of learning - to such an extent that they do not accept that it is both the province and the role of parents in the eighties to become involved in the curriculum decision-making process as it will affect their children. Many of the attempts which have been made to involve such parents, such as the current drive to encourage girls to take up non-traditional occupations (e.g., plumbing, the automotive trades) have been both culturally inappropriate and a signal failure. Careers teachers in schools tend to be dominantly Anglo in origin and attitudes, a status quo which has been little modified by the minimal professional training to which most have been exposed

Capacity and confidence to use a variety of information sources has been found to be closely related to command of the English language. People who speak English effectively " were found to be able to spread their net more widely, and to use a greater range of sources" (Scott Report, 1980, 5.2.16). Even where multi-lingual sources are used, a number of fundamental problems have emerged. Print media, even when translated, depend for their efficacy on utilizing the appropriate dialect and on the literacy level of the individual in that language. Where an oral form of communication is used to eliminate the latter problem, the difficulties of using concepts which are familiar and an idiom which is understandable remain.

Within the very fabric of contemporary Australian society there exists a fundamental dissonance between the myopia of monolingualism and a government commitment to community languages and cultural maintenance. The English as mother tongue population lacks a genuine sense of community except in reactive recognition of other more tightly knit communities. The levels of tolerance and understanding run low and, despite every humanizing attempt, racism festers; its potential eruption remains a constant threat to Australia's developing nationhood.

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